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ENGLAND'S MISSION

BY

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ENGLAND'S MISSION

THE subject of this paper is, What is England's mission? or, in other words, in what cause are we fighting in the present war? A second question, arising out of the first, is this, Is our cause good or bad in the usual sense of those words? It seems unnecessary to demonstrate the overwhelming practical importance of these questions. A very intelligent Nonconformist inquired of me, not many days ago, on what special grounds can we implore the blessing of God on our arms? On what ground should He be asked to favour us rather than our adversaries? Are we fighting for our hearths and homes, for our wives and children? So are they. Are we fighting for our national prosperity and independence? So are they. Are we fighting for the triumph of our national ideals? So are they. In these, and many other similar questions that might be asked, there is no difference between one side and the other; no reason why we are justified in asking for special favour for our own. Every one, whether English, French, or German, has his family, his friends, his country, and its national ideal, and all are, or ought to be, equally dear to every one. The question is natural, and in the highest degree reasonable: it is based on the eternal sense of justice; which is one of the highest privileges of humanity. It not only deserves an answer, but it is of great practical importance that one should be given; for men, and especially men of the best type, will not give their whole heart to a cause when they feel any scruple as to its justice.

Taking nations as a whole, there is one point on which they all differ, at least in some degree, and that is the national ideal ; and, for whatever other causes they may go to war, the fortunes of their respective ideals will at the same time be involved. From what beginnings, or by what stages, ideals develop, we need not stop to inquire. It is enough for us to recognize that all nations have an ideal, even if it be only destructive, and that in this respect small nations are of at least equal value as great. Indeed, all the great ideals which now govern civilization have been derived from petty States. The Jews gave us our beliefs on the relations between man and God ; to Athens and to Florence we owe our art ; to Athens also we owe the beginnings of our philosophy. Early Rome was the cradle of law. Since the birth of Islam the ideals which divided mankind have usually been religious. It is possible that even now we may not have seen the last of the great wars between the Cross and the Crescent. The wars between Catholic and Protestant have been less protracted, but hardly less bitter or less devastating. It will aid the reader to comprehend the tenor of what follows if we state that the conflict now in progress is, in our opinion, between religious and irreligious ideals. The dispute, of course, is not on the field of dogmatic beliefs but between the morality of the Gospel and the total rejection of morality by such writers as Machiavelli and Nietzsche.

The peculiar mission of each nation is the maintenance development, and propagation of its own ideals. Freedom is the condition under which the ideal can be realized ; and tyranny the condition under which it is held down and stifled by a competing ideal ; and if men value freedom more than even their own lives, it is because nothing else in this life is so dear to them as

the special task that has been set before them. What then is the special task which has been set before England? Englishmen have no need to be told. The answer will leap to every Englishman's lips. It is Freedom; the preservation of their own freedom, and the communication of the same inestimable blessing to others.

In some respects the mission of Rome was the same, but it fell far short of ours. Hers was the establishment of law, and the protection of the individual from outrage, and spoliation, by superior force. As Virgil says, 'To spare the humble, and abase the proud.' In the words of the town-clerk at Ephesus, 'The courts are open, and there are Proconsuls.' The success with which the Romans laboured for this end, and the gratitude which they thereby earned, are shown by the contented loyalty of the provincials at the time, and the enduring power and majesty of the name of the Eternal City. Rome, through law, secured the freedom of the individual, and their gratitude was her great reward. But, she was unable to rise to the conception of political freedom. The law and the political institutions throughout the Empire were Roman, and, in consequence, her rule from the beginning to the end was wholly sterile of new political ideas.

England has been selected for a more difficult, and much nobler, enterprise in the cause of civilization. Our lesson was learned in the revolt of our American colonies. They were animated with a love of freedom, which they inherited from their British forefathers, and they made us ashamed for our temporary departure from its principles. Judged by its results, their revolt may prove to be the greatest event in history; the

turning point from which the tide of evolution has set, for the whole world, as well as for ourselves, in the direction of freedom. But in America, too, the conflict of the same ideals is likely to be repeated: nearly half the population is German, and inherited ideals are not easily lost. We, at any rate, have never forgotten the lesson; never repeated the offence. To each of our colonies, the heirs of our common traditions and our common speech, we have given the priceless gift of perfect independence; not merely internal law and order, as the Romans did, but an unshackled control over their development in all its branches, political, social, religious, and commercial, in which it is possible that its interests may come into conflict with our own. The same measure of renunciation we have lately repeated in the cases of the Boer Republics, and of the Irish nation, under risks which may have appeared exceptionally great. Who among us now repents of our confidence, or will call it mistaken? With the inhabitants of India our relations have been the same. We have already given them a more than Roman peace, and they recognize with gratitude the sincerity of our desire—attested by often-repeated measures in that direction—to admit them, not only into partnership with ourselves, but to a complete and unreserved independence. The test of results has not proved discouraging to those who advocate the principle that love is a stronger bond of union than material force.

Freedom, however, is an ideal state, which we work for, and not a rule for the guidance of our conduct—it is a beacon, and not a compass. The compass, by which the English direct their course, is duty. Nelson's signal, 'England expects every man to do his duty',

appealed to the highest (I use the word deliberately) instincts of the English people. The epitaph dictated on his death-bed by Henry Lawrence, 'Here lies Henry Lawrence, who tried to do his duty. May the Lord have mercy on his soul', sums up the whole of the moral and religious genius of our race. Duty is to us what the glory is to others. When we ask for the meaning of the term, we find that it is obedience to a command for no other reason than that it proceeds from a recognized authority. This virtue is possessed by the Germans in the very highest degree, and it is, and has been since the beginning of their history, the chief secret of their success. German obedience, however, differs from English obedience in recognizing another seat of authority. The German obeys his superior officer, whose right to command is ultimately derived from the Emperor. This is a noble quality; but the command proceeds from without, and its operation is not in the direction of freedom. English obedience, on the contrary, is paid to the conscience, the internal ruler, which may be found in every man's breast. The man who obeys that voice is his own master, and enjoys the highest form of freedom. Wordsworth apostrophizes duty as 'Stern daughter of the voice of God', and that is the English view as to the source of those authoritative commands. No nation can dispense with the recognition of both forms of authority, the human as well as the divine; and we, perhaps, at any rate in civil life, have far too little of the former. With the general problem, however, we need not trouble ourselves. All that concerns us is, that the predominant source of authority is, in Germany, the Emperor; to the Englishman, his God. With no race has the voice of conscience been more respected than with the Romans, and none have left

more splendid examples of heroism. The German programme exactly reverses theirs ; it is : 'To spurn the humble, and exalt the proud'. Weakness to the German is a crime, and to oppress it a virtue. To the Roman conscience, the seat of authority was the Law.

All the chief moral impulses, or tendencies, may be classed under one or other of two great divisions as either egotistic or altruistic ; as, in plain English, tendencies towards self-assertion or towards self-effacement. Towards which of these does our national ideal lean ? Let our works answer for us. The task we have accepted at the command of our national conscience, and with a blind confidence in the issue, is to impart to others all the power which is derived from freedom, even including such knowledge as may be used against ourselves ; and all the while we forgo the profit in services and tribute, which, to all nations but our own, has appeared to be inherent in that kind of relation. And not only that ; for, while they were still in their nonage, we have taken on our shoulders the whole burden of defence and tutelage. Cries have been heard in our midst of 'Perish the colonies ! Perish India !' ; our material interests may have seemed to dictate assent, but we have always closed our ears to them, as false to duty. A distinguished Austrian statesman once assured our Government in India that in imparting higher knowledge to our subjects we were sealing our own doom ; and Germans certainly do not follow the precedent. The vernacular newspapers in India, at one time, teemed with gross and filthy libels against the Government and its officers. Did we put them down ? The task was easy, and we were loudly recommended, for our own safety, to do it ; but our national instincts again intervened, and it was to them, and not to force, that

we owed our safety. Was this timidity, or courage? baseness, or magnanimity? Selfish or unselfish? Let us not boast. A nation has no more right to boast of its instincts than a man of his personal beauty. But when our motives are arraigned, we must defend them, not for our own sake, but in the defence of our cause. The magnanimous always incur this danger—that their motives may be misinterpreted; and their magnanimity itself prevents them from taking any serious notice of the mistake. It is their nature to yield to others advantages which they might have retained for themselves. Such a habit is interpreted as mere cowardice by those who are not themselves magnanimous. Whenever we make a fresh concession to Indian public opinion, they are not ashamed of lowering us in the esteem of our subjects, and encouraging revolt, by proclaiming on the housetops that we never yield except to threats; though the real and obvious reason is, that we should be unwise to yield to a demand before we are assured that it is both genuine and popular. Our guiding principles in these cases are in conformity with Christian teaching. The Christian too renounces his own advantage, is not easily provoked, and endures contempt and reproach without resentment. The comparison of a spider fattening on a fly, which is current among Germans, was no doubt suggested by utterances of the same class and the same origin. The fly, at any rate, has no reason to complain. She is ten times fatter now than she was when the depleting process began.

Many other illustrations of the same general tendency might be adduced, such as the emancipation of our slaves, our missions, religious or medical, and other countless philanthropic enterprises; but we must not close the account without mention of one which is of

special significance. We were the first to reform our code of honour by the abolition of duelling. This was not prompted by want of manliness—our courage has been proved on hundreds of battlefields, but to our self-effacement in the presence of the law which brought us very close to the distinctively Christian virtue of humility, and exposed us to the same feelings of dislike and impatience which are inspired in self-assertive natures by the sight of that virtue. Self-effacement in mundane affairs becomes self-abasement in our relations with the Almighty.

We may now proceed to consider the German ideal or mission. And first we may rule out a subject which, judging from the space which the newspapers allot to it, must be of great interest to the public—that is, who is responsible for the war? who was the aggressor? We need not begin a general disquisition on the causes of war, but, confining ourselves to the present case, we may state our opinion that one nation is as responsible as the other, or rather, that neither is responsible. Responsibility is not incurred except when there is a free choice, and the act may be declined. When personal ambition is the cause, the aggressor is no doubt responsible, and is deserving of censure; but when it is a matter of life and death, there is no blame, for every living being, from the highest to the lowest, must fight for existence, and there can be no reasonable objection to his choosing his own time. In the present case, the recent victories of the Slavs threatened the Teutonic races with their own favourite movement of envelopment. They are no more to be blamed for struggling for escape than a wasp is, when one of its legs has been entangled in a spider's web. But, since we deny the right of Germany to secure herself at the

expense of France and Belgium, we too are involved, and our own existence is at stake. Such struggles are the certain and necessary result of the natural increase of population, for which no one is to be blamed. But they involve the dispossession of a neighbour, and the neighbour in this case is England.

The professed aim of Germany is universal empire, and Germans add that this is the ultimate end of all wars, attributing it to ourselves in our wars with Napoleon, and at other times. This is not quite true, for we have often given back conquests which we might have retained, and forgone them when they might have been made without much difficulty. We may, however, admit that the proposition is generally true. The really important question is this: what are the further results on account of which empire is desired? They may be either altruist or egotist, and we want to know, in each case, under which of these two categories it falls. Let us begin with our own aim in the Napoleonic wars. It was to secure freedom—not only for ourselves, but also for all other nations in Europe, including the Germans—to develop, each and all of them, its own type of civilization, on its own appropriate lines; this may fairly be described as, in the main, altruistic. The aim of Napoleon, on the contrary, was the diffusion of the typical principles of the French Revolution, and the destruction of all that were opposed to them, thereby creating a French empire, with himself at the head of it. This may fairly be called egotistic. Similarly, it is reported of Alexander that his professed aim was to make Greeks of the barbarians. The aim of the Germans is no doubt to make all men like themselves, and to extinguish all conflicting types of civilization. But the advance of civilization is dependent on

the interaction, friendly or hostile, between two or more types ; if there were only one type, there would be no interaction and no advance ; and this would certainly be the consequence of our defeat. Under the one-sided ideal of the Germans, the civilization of Europe would enter on a period of rapid decay. The lamp of freedom would have fallen from our hands, and we could only hope that it would be taken up in the New World.

There are two subjects which have a vital bearing on the direction in which the German ideal is likely to influence our beliefs and conduct. The superiority of Germany is generally acknowledged in the two departments of metaphysics and criticism. Kant, the imperishable glory of her philosophy, was a pure-bred Scotsman, and he inherited from his covenanting forefathers a fervent sense of religion. The German temper first manifested itself in his successors. Hegel still remained on good terms with Christianity, and professed a sympathy with her doctrines which, if not feigned, was at any rate strangely inconsistent with his own intellectual conclusions. Schopenhauer made no secret of his dislike and contempt. Others, in our own day, while following Hegel in professions of friendship, cut away all the doctrine which is inconsistent with a scientific pantheism— an operation which can only be compared to the excision of their friend's heart. At the present day, much the most popular of all is Nietzsche, whose rabid animosity against Christian ethics is his sole recommendation as a philosopher. In criticism, the tendency of the German mind has always been, in the main, destructive. Not long ago they attempted to dismember Homer, but after a long campaign, in which they exhibited great skill, learning,

and audacity, they have been forced to abandon that field. Next, with Strauss of Tübingen and his school, they turned the arms of their criticism against the Bible. There again the frontal attack has, in the main, failed, and the theologians, with professions of friendliness, which in their case are, no doubt, sincere, are busy undermining all the distinctive doctrines of the Faith, leaving nothing behind but a rational Socinianism. The same irreligious feeling pervades all classes, and all literature. We are told that religion is no longer the dominant force in man's life, which is no doubt true of Germany. Apologies for religion are stigmatized as 'obscurantist'. We are blamed as unworthy of our position in India, because we have failed to transplant some new form of pantheism to England, in the same way, we may suppose, as mediæval travellers brought devil worship from the East to Aquitaine.

It is to be hoped that enough has been said to remove all scruples as to the justice of our cause, and to make it clear on what special grounds, not shared by our enemies, we are justified in imploring for our arms the favour of the Almighty. Our cause is freedom, the freedom of political institutions. Our adversaries profess that they seek freedom of thought; but if they do, it is for themselves only; our thought is not as their thought, and a man is not free when he works for the ideals of a master. Again, free thought cannot subsist without free institutions. Under a despotism it lives, if at all, on sufferance; its growth is restricted and unnatural, and it will not flourish long. Again, having secured freedom for ourselves, we use it in the interests of others: we desire freedom not only on our own account, but for the whole of mankind, as far as our influence extends. Within the whole of the Empire

there is no single community which does not, so far as that lies in our power, enjoy a perfect independence, living under its own laws, following out its own ideals, and paying no taxes except what are spent on its own development. In carrying out this aim we have had to make considerable sacrifices, and have forgone advantages which others would have insisted on. Our rewards have been, first, a peaceful commerce, unfettered by any regulations, save such as may have been freely agreed on for the mutual and equal benefit of ourselves and our customers; and secondly, what we value above all other rewards, the affection and gratitude of our affiliated peoples. Our guiding principles have been respect for law and love of freedom, both for ourselves and for others also. This, certainly, is one good reason for imploring the divine favour against a nation who love neither freedom nor self-effacement, and who are certainly not meek. Add to this the direct evidence of the animosity against Christianity which is openly professed by their representative philosophers, and, what is still more significant, the destructive criticism of those who honestly believe themselves to be its friends.

Is it not possible to connect all the various points of dissimilarity between the two races by means of some deeper distinction, of which they are only (so to speak) the symptoms? I think it is, and that it is essential to a comprehension of our cause that the true nature of the opposition should be clearly understood. Paradoxical though the statement may at first appear, the fundamental distinction between our aims and those of Germany is that between the love of humanity and the love of country. Both of these are highly deserving of respect, for both involve the sacrifice of

merely personal and selfish interests to those of an ideal, but one is much more completely unselfish than the other; for, in one case, the sacrifice is on behalf of an ideal of which we are ourselves a part, and by whose maintenance we personally benefit, whereas in the other it is made on behalf of the whole of humanity, and must necessarily include innumerable interests which are, or seem to be, in direct opposition to our own. Now, of these two ideals, it is certainly the more comprehensive that is favoured by Christianity. That commands us to love all men, without distinction, as the sons of one Father. The love of the whole of humanity, without distinction of race or nation, is therefore a part of our religion and indissolubly connected with our worship; it not only can but must be admitted into our petitions, as an integral part of our religious duties.

Patriotism, or the willing sacrifice of the individual to his country, was the highest virtue of antiquity. Among the nations of those times foreigners were of no more value than cattle, and in some cases of even less. To the Greek and Roman they were barbarians. It was only after a long struggle that they were admitted at Rome to equal fellowship at board and bed. The Jew would not eat with the Gentile, and the Hindu, at the present day, puts the descendants of aborigines below the lowest of the castes of his own race, makes intermarriage with them a capital offence to both the parties, and regards their touch as a greater pollution than that of any animal. Moreover, by their inhuman regulations, they have reduced them to a state which almost justifies the loathing. This, though it usually falls short of full achievement, is the ultimate result of a policy of selfish conquest; the reduction of the

conquered to the condition of hewers of wood and drawers of water, or worse. Moreover, in our own days the danger is peculiarly horrible. There are many kinds of work (and the number increases with evolution) which are so repellent, and even degrading, that no free man will willingly undertake them. The conquerors will require slaves, and will take them from the conquered people. Patriotism is the dominant ethical principle of the Germans, and it will no doubt mould their conduct, should they ever become possessed of the empire which is the object of their desires. Dangers of this kind have been put an end to by the doctrine of universal brotherhood in all lands where the Christian faith is both professed and acted on.

The people of Russia, though in an earlier stage of political development, are animated by the same spirit as ourselves. In no other part of the world has their religion so strong an influence in the lives of the masses, and in their fiction—a certain reflection of their spirit—a profound sympathy with the trials and hopes of the poor and the humble and the afflicted, joined with an indifference, if not hostility, to the ambitions of the rich, display, as no other literature ever did, the *anima naturaliter Christiana*.

Some have been surprised that no mention of so great a virtue as patriotism is to be found from one end to the other of the New Testament. The reason is now clear. That was a rule of conduct which it was the mission of Christianity to supersede, and there was no need to enjoin it. But to supersede is not to cancel. The Mosaic ritual itself was not abrogated, but was retained as a servant to faith. In the same way, patriotism was retained, more glorious as a servant to humanity than when it held the first place itself.

Its use was to assist the altruist State in putting forth the utmost possible amount of energy. A State that loved others only would not be nearly so strong as one that loved itself also, as a minister to the welfare of others. The altruistic principle when it stands alone, without the necessary prop of patriotism, soon decays, and becomes too weak to withstand the meaner impulses of sloth and luxury, with all their attendant evils. And here we may remark on the fallacy that is involved in condemning all small States to extinction. The value of a State is proportionate, not to the number of its inhabitants, but to the greatness of its achievements.

It has been our singular good fortune that both these principles have received adequate recognition in our Parliament. The Whigs have represented universalism; the Tories patriotism. It is a general rule that the first is appropriate to dealings with people within our Empire; the second, for peoples with whom we are at war. So long as the Boers held out, our proper guide was patriotism; as soon as they laid down their arms, universalism. The justice of our cause, though it ought to be our only guide while we are still at peace, loses all relevance directly war is declared. During the course of a war, either to question that, or to forget our patriotism, is treason, and deserves to be punished as that.

Before leaving the subject let us apply these considerations to our own case. Let it not be supposed that in extolling our mission I extol ourselves. It is one thing to have a mission and another to fulfil it, and the neglect of its duty is the delinquency which brings down on a nation the scourge of God. On this charge it would be difficult to clear us. Let us consider

what a German might have seen if he had turned his eyes on England early this year. In what words would he have been likely to describe what met his eyes? A Government defied in one of the three kingdoms; an apathetic people who rejected the advice and traduced the motives of the veteran leader of their armies, when he made an appeal to their manhood; who relied on their navy, and complained when called on to pay for more ships; unable or unwilling to defend themselves, each man with his own right hand. Our Legislature would have shown him an habitual preference, on both sides alike, of petty party aims over large national interests, which turned the august Mother of Parliaments into a by-word among the nations; and all the time his ears would have been dinned with vociferous professions of sanctity which accorded ill with the meanness and luxury of our lives. All this he would have seen, or thought he saw. It is true that the view was one-sided, and he might have seen more had he wished to; but it was not all illusion. The basis of concrete fact was wide and solid, and it provoked war and seemed to justify it. It is well we should not forget this ourselves; for those tendencies actually held the lead amongst us at the time; even now they are far from being extinct, and, unless we are watchful, they may easily recapture us. If, exchanging parts, we had observed Germany at the same period, we should have found a great nation straining every nerve and sinew on the prosecution of a single aim; without doubt or dissension among themselves, sacrificing all that opposed that aim, and training, like a good athlete, for its realization. Whatever we may think of the aim, and, so far as it was self-preservation, we must approve, there was nothing in the spectacle itself to inspire contempt

Even an enemy must admire. And when a German compared what he saw in us with what he felt to be true of himself, what must his conclusions have been? Shall we boast of this? Ought we not rather to repent?

The sum of the matter is this. By their strenuous and sustained self-devotion, the Germans have thrown lustre on a bad cause. We are the heirs of the noblest cause of all times, that of Freedom, and, by our apathy, and indolence, and selfish luxury, we have come near to betraying it. Many of us have never fallen, many others, but not all, have repented. Let our repentance be heartfelt and general. Let us burn the new gods we have worshipped, and hate what we have lately desired, lest at a not distant future a worse thing overtake us.

And let us fight for victory, but not for peace with a probable relapse into the sloth and self-indulgence from which we have just been awakened. The soldier of freedom can never expect a lasting peace, but will always be prepared for fresh trials, and heavier sacrifices. We must recognize that even now nothing short of our utmost effort will avail to preserve our threatened freedom.

And let us not rely overmuch on the empire of the sea, lest that prove to be a snare instead of a bulwark. Think of what might have been our lot if the day had been decided against us at Trafalgar. Let no one expect or even wish to be exempt from his full share of risk and hardship. Should there be any such among us, I would say to him; 'Our sailors and soldiers are doing all they can, almost beyond the limit of human endurance; but if, trusting in your ships and the valour of your brothers, you are so mean as to prefer football to fighting,

and neglect to prepare yourselves for war, you may soon become the slave you deserve to be.'

NOTE.—I append a short extract from a recent number of *The Times* :

'We have received the following from the Contessa Evelyn Martinengo Cesaresco :

I translate from the *Secolo* of to-day, October 19, the following conversation between the correspondent of that newspaper and one of the King's Indian soldiers now in France.

The correspondent was curious to know what was the spirit of the Indian troops. "Are you glad," he asked, "to have come here to fight for a country which is not yours—France—at the bidding of another country—England—which dominates you?"

The Indian looked at him with eyes full of wonder and indignation, and replied: "India is not oppressed by any one; she is a part, and not a small part, of a great Empire. Therefore the Indians are not slaves of this Empire, but subjects as are the English, the Scottish, and the Irish. The English Empire is menaced by a nation called Germany, and to defend itself it has appealed to all its subjects. If the Empire were menaced in India, the English soldiers would have gone there, but as it is menaced in Europe, we have come here." He added in accents of profound pride, "We are English!"

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